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ABSTRACT

Consistent with national trends, white males hold the majority of public school administrator positions in North Carolina. This paper examines the barriers and underlying assumptions that have prevented women and minorities from gaining access to high-level positions in educational administration. These include: (1) the assumption that leadership as defined by white males is superior; (2) the tendency of those in power to avoid cultural conflict; (3) the historically based separation of management functions from teaching; (4) the adherence to a bureaucratic school structure; and (5) socialization processes that limit women from aspiring to leadership positions. The paper also describes the role of women and minorities in carrying out the leadership goals recommended by the North Carolina Educational Leadership Task Force--defining a purpose, moving from management to leadership, changing organizational structures, fostering the development of learning communities, and enhancing educational quality and equity. Contains 17 references. (LMI)

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Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Women in School Administration

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Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Women in School Administration

Achievement of gender and racial equity within the realm of public school administration is ostensibly valued in this country, yet statistics released in the December, 1993 issue of *Executive Educator*, demonstrate that nationally 89% of school superintendents and high school principals are men, and an overwhelming 97% of school superintendents and 90% of high school principals are white. It is obvious that white males continue to maintain positions of power and privilege in America's public schools; institutions which significantly impact children living in an increasingly diverse society.

In 1993, the North Carolina General Assembly commissioned an Educational Leadership Task Force to examine the present status of practicing school administrators as well as preparation programs offered by the State's institutions of higher education, and to make recommendations for the development and promotion of new school leaders who would administer reformed schools and school systems. It is not surprising, that consistent with national trends, the Task Force found that white men constitute the majority of public school administrators in the state of North Carolina.

The first recommendation made by the Educational Leadership Task Force in its report to the General Assembly in February, 1993 contains the statement that "particular attention must be given to the needs of the educational system for administrators who are women and people of color." As reassuring as such a statement might be, it is still disconcerting to think, throughout the years, issues of gender and

race equity have virtually been ignored and therefore ultimately remain unresolved.

The superficial rhetoric accorded the issues of gender and race equity within the arena of education administration masks a number of underlying assumptions that serve to maintain the status quo. These assumptions, or commonly held beliefs, are so embedded and nested, they generally remain unquestioned and unchallenged, resulting in taken-for-granted and unconscious behavior patterns that become reified as "universal truths".

Within these assumptions exists a world view in which gender and racial equity issues are no longer considered to be a problem. It is assumed that organizational manifestations of equality, equity, fairness and honesty are the norm and that citizens are protected by the enactment of legislation, policies and mandates. This world view has managed to render the issues of gender and racial equity invisible (Hyle, 1992) and does not accurately portray the reality of women and minorities faced with impediments to success in the field of education administration.

In this paper I attempt to examine the barriers and the underlying assumptions contributing to the reification of existing cultural and organizational structures. These hidden barriers and assumptions have stood the test of time and pervasively continue to prevent women and minorities from accessing high level school administration positions, thus keeping the glass ceiling intact.

The Educational Leadership Task Force's report articulates five beliefs concerning "leadership for tomorrow's schools" that emphasize the need for diversity within the ranks of public school

administration; beliefs which represent the antithesis to mainstream, white male-dominated bureaucratic conceptions of leadership. These beliefs are used as a framework for exploring the possibility of shattering the glass ceiling and offering hope for achieving genuine equity:

1) *Defining purpose*—establishing vision rather than managing existing arrangements; 2) *Moving from management to leadership*—leading the transition from a bureaucratic model to a postindustrial model; 3) *Changing organizational structures*—replacing a traditional focus on stability with a new focus on change; 4) *Fostering the development of learning communities*—nurturing learning, caring, professional communities based on democratic values; and 5) *Enhancing educational quality and equity*—increased commitment and investment in children and education.

Access Denied—Who Are The Gatekeepers?

According to George Kaplan (1989), within less than a decade the population of public schools will be comprised of one-third minority students; yet school administrators are predicted to remain largely white, male and middle-aged. Kaplan paints a grim picture of the future of education administration:

> White males rule the roost and are likely to remain in command for decades to come. At current rates, the climate for a genuinely integrated, or even desegregated leadership corps in public education is chilly.

We live in a society in which white men define and legitimate the dominant culture. It is tacitly assumed that the white male-defined standards for what constitutes effective leadership is superior.

It is also assumed that because the educational values, leadership styles and day to day activities of women and non-white males is different from white men, such behavior is deemed inappropriate and must be changed (Marshall, 1984; Weber, Feldman & Poling, 1981).

Women and minorities, therefore, are expected to conform to the leadership behavior valued and legitimated by the dominant culture. If they intend to succeed, women and minorities must force themselves to fit the existing norms of the organizational hierarchy. For example, administrator preparation programs designed specifically for women often reflect an assumption that women need to change themselves; need to correct their deficiencies (Ortiz & Marshall, 1986; Marshall & Mitchell, 1989).

Henry Giroux (1992) further asserts that even those who consider themselves liberals espouse a philosophy that oppressed groups need to be "remade in the image of a dominant white culture in order to be integrated into the heavenly city of Enlightenment rationality." In her feminist critique of bureaucracy, Kathy Ferguson (1984) argues that a focus on integrating women into public institutions merely perpetuates bureaucratic discourse rather than challenging it, leaving important questions unasked and alternatives not envisioned.

This world of white men is highly valued and is often not friendly to women or minorities. People tend to hire people like themselves, therefore white males hire white males (Shakeshaft, 1989). Catherine Marshall (1992) concludes that culture conflict results when a woman or person of color seeks entry into public school administration. Potential white male mentors or sponsors

experience discomfort and are thus likely to avoid anyone who is not like them. Moreover, sponsors are more likely to provide access and support to those most resembling themselves (Marshall & Mitchell, 1989).

Women and minorities who are permitted into the world of education administration tend to have few opportunities for career mobility. They are often assigned to staff positions, administering special projects and/or supervising their own group (Marshall, 1992; Bell & Chase, 1992). They frequently assume roles as tokens with little or no legitimacy within the organization.

Minority administrators face additional burdens as they are typically assigned to special programs or schools with large minority populations; usually with inadequate resources, large concentrations of economically disadvantaged students and concomitant low standardized test scores (Bell & Chase, 1992).

The Educational Leadership Task Force envisions administrators of tomorrow's schools as heavily invested in defining the purpose of schools. These new leaders must be able to articulate a vision of schooling that is significantly different from that of the past. Continuing to maintain business as usual is no longer acceptable. Since their values are often outside the mainstream, women and minorities are certainly in a unique position to interpret and place new priorities on the guiding principles for education. The multiple voices of women and people of color that have long been silenced are able to interject into the public arena fresh perspectives and a reformulation of the purpose of schools.

In the Belly of the Beast: Bureaucratic Barriers

Public schools acquired their bureaucratic structures more than a century ago. Bureaucracy was viewed as an effective means of gaining control over the large numbers of immigrants arriving daily on America's shores. Consequently, the myth of an impersonal, efficient, rule-oriented and productive organization was born. Industrialization and bureaucracy also resulted in the separation of work and home life, thus producing the myth that men were supposed to be the permanent members of the work force. Women were considered only transient members, as they were expected to exit the work force once they married (Ginn, 1989). The social standards at the turn of the century described the superior being as "white, male, middle-aged, Protestant, and married" (Ginn, 1989). This "standard" has prevailed for almost one hundred years.

The widespread adoption of Scientific Management practices during the early 20th century produced the separation of management functions from teaching (Altenbaugh, 1987). The division of labor that resulted from Scientific Management rapidly became the fundamental paradigm for structuring schools. Women assumed the role of teachers and men were placed into management positions over them. This dichotomy and gender hierarchy has continued to predominate within the modern bureaucratic structures of schools and has reified the "masculine ethic" of school administration. Women teach students and men administer adults (Ortiz, 1982).

Bureaucracy and principles of scientific management continue to be the norm, even during this era of school restructuring. Bureaucratic systems nurture male leadership and the "good old boy"

network, as well as breeds conformity and a myopic world view. (Ginn, 1989). Bureaucratic structures are antithetical to a vision of schools as sites of democratic values and diversity.

The Educational Leadership Task Force calls for a reorientation of school administration from management to leadership. The Task Force asserts that management alone is insufficient for the challenge of leading tomorrow's schools, and new school leaders will be expected to lead the transition away from the bureaucratic model of schooling. Women and minorities who have gained the least from school bureaucracies certainly have the greatest potential to effect systemic change. Ferguson (1984) suggests that feminist discourse can provide a way of thinking and acting that does not perpetuate nor extend bureaucratic discourse, but offers a voice in opposition.

Disempowerment of the People

Along with serving as gatekeepers, white men have laid claim to the center of power for themselves, relegating everyone else to the margins. The insidiousness of hegemony has created a society in which we believe this to be the natural order with white men merely assuming their rightful roles. White males determine what has value and what does not. Those groups on the margins of society have not only been taught to believe they are inferior, they contribute to their own subjugation by believing in their inferiority.

This notion has further been reinforced by the Reagan and Bush administrations; bastions of neo-conservatism who typify hegemonic white male superiority. It can not be denied that white men, especially older, wealthy white men, gained the most from Reagan and

Bush's political agendas. Reagan and Bush provided virtually no support for equity issues in education. Furthermore, the Reagan administration cut federal funds that supported social programs for those who are the most dependent on public education: the poor, people of color, minorities, the working class and other subordinated groups (Giroux, 1992).

White men are now faced with women and minority groups stirring restlessly on the margins, demanding to be heard. Those with power do not want to relinquish any of their control and therefore pretend to value diversity while clinging desperately to their threatened positions of power and privilege. The more subordinate groups resist, the more the dominant culture reacts by exerting tighter control.

The Task Force calls for a radical change in the structure of schools that includes systemic reconfiguration of organization and governance. Bureaucratic structures that emphasize control, supervision and evaluation are to be replaced with community management of schools which emphasize cooperation, empowerment and participation. Again, women and minorities are in preferable positions for effecting this type of systemic change. Bureaucracies have not been kind to them and they have no reason to perpetuate a system that has served only to exclude, subjugate and control. The attributes of cooperation, empowerment, participation, and community are consistent with women's world view and feminist discourse.

Women's Roles: Nature Vs. Nurture

Linda Alcoff (1988) succinctly states, "It is well documented that the innateness of gender differences in personality and character is at this point factually and philosophically indefensible." Nevertheless, many men and women still adhere to the notion of gender-specific "natural" attributes, such as men are more rational and women are more emotional. As Ferguson (1984) argues, "biology simply cannot be used to explain arrangements that are historically and cross-culturally variant, as are gender arrangements."

However, the sex role socialization of girls and women to assume traditional female roles does contribute to their lack of success in a traditionally male-defined career path. This socialization process teaches women to demonstrate passivity, deference and self-abasement. They are taught not to take risks; not to be ambitious, but to maintain their male-defined femininity. These socially constructed role definitions produce negative consequences for women who have aspired to high-level administration positions. Such women are viewed as aberrant or deviant, especially if they do not become acculturated to the bureaucratic structure of schools.

Administrative roles are considered at odds with more traditional women's roles of teaching and motherhood. I know a number of talented women whose lack of confidence in their own abilities has tremendously hindered their careers. They claim no desire to aspire to higher levels within organizations for a variety of reasons: they feel compelled to choose between work and their families, they fear the responsibility, or they are not interested in doing a "man's job".

It is, however, important to recognize that women are socialized differently from men, and that women's behavioral characteristics, values, and ways of structuring activity, at this point in time, are not acceptable within the administrative culture defined by white males. Women's socialized behavior patterns and characteristics do seem to be more aligned with the Educational Leadership's Task Force's description of new school leadership that must be able to foster nurturing, caring, learning communities.

The Victim Has Been Blamed Long Enough

It is often assumed that women and minorities have equal access to school administration opportunities and that if they do not achieve success, they have only themselves to blame. As an example, an article written by women concerning the underrepresentation of women in education administration, asserts that sex-role stereotypes are often perpetuated by women themselves (Weber, Feldman and Poling,1981). In other words, women are to blame for perpetuating sex-role stereotypes, such as perceiving themselves to be less competent and having low aspirations. What these women writers have failed to consider is that at this point in time many women are only able to define themselves in relation to the dominant culture. That is, they are defined as incompetent, weak, and illogical in opposition to the dominant culture's definition of themselves as competent, strong and rational.

Most commentators on women's issues have finally rejected the notion of "internal barriers" as a reason for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Bell & Chase, 1992). What was

previously thought to be an internal barrier, such as lack of aspiration, is actually an external barrier due to the cultural and organizational constraints faced by women.

Affirmative action and legislation to provide women and minorities with equal opportunities are inadequate primarily because the onus is placed on the victim to provide burden of proof. Those already in subordinated positions have neither the energy nor the resources to fight such a powerful system.

The Task Force calls for school leadership that will enhance both educational equity and excellence. Those who have been victims of the inequities within our current system are more likely to be sensitive to the need to balance these values rather than choosing one over the other.

The Hope of the Future

The beliefs espoused by the Educational Leadership Task Force offer hope for the future of schools as democratic sites where diversity is not only accepted, but celebrated at all levels—by and with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. Policymakers who, by and large are predominantly white men, must be committed to making it happen. There is more at stake than just equity for women and minorities in school administration; the future success of our schools hangs in the balance.

The systemic changes proposed by the Task Force will not come easily; they are especially threatening to those unwilling to share their power. We can no longer settle for policies and laws that either are not actively enforced or are relegated to the political periphery.

This redefinition of leadership will also require a different kind of school leader than is typically found in today's schools. Within this vision there is adequate space for accommodating the multitude of leaders who will emerge from women and minority groups once existing obstacles have been removed. There is enough room at the center and enough power to share if a system truly values democratic processes. The use of the metaphor "glass ceiling" implies a penetrable, not impermeable barrier to those on the outside looking in. The glass ceiling is also a fragile edifice which can not withstand the constant and unrelenting pressure applied by women and minorities. Can you hear the sound of breaking glass?

If the Task Force's vision of a different breed of school leader is to be realized, diversity within administration must be actively embraced and must not be allowed to deteriorate into empty rhetoric that eventually fades, once again, into invisibility.

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